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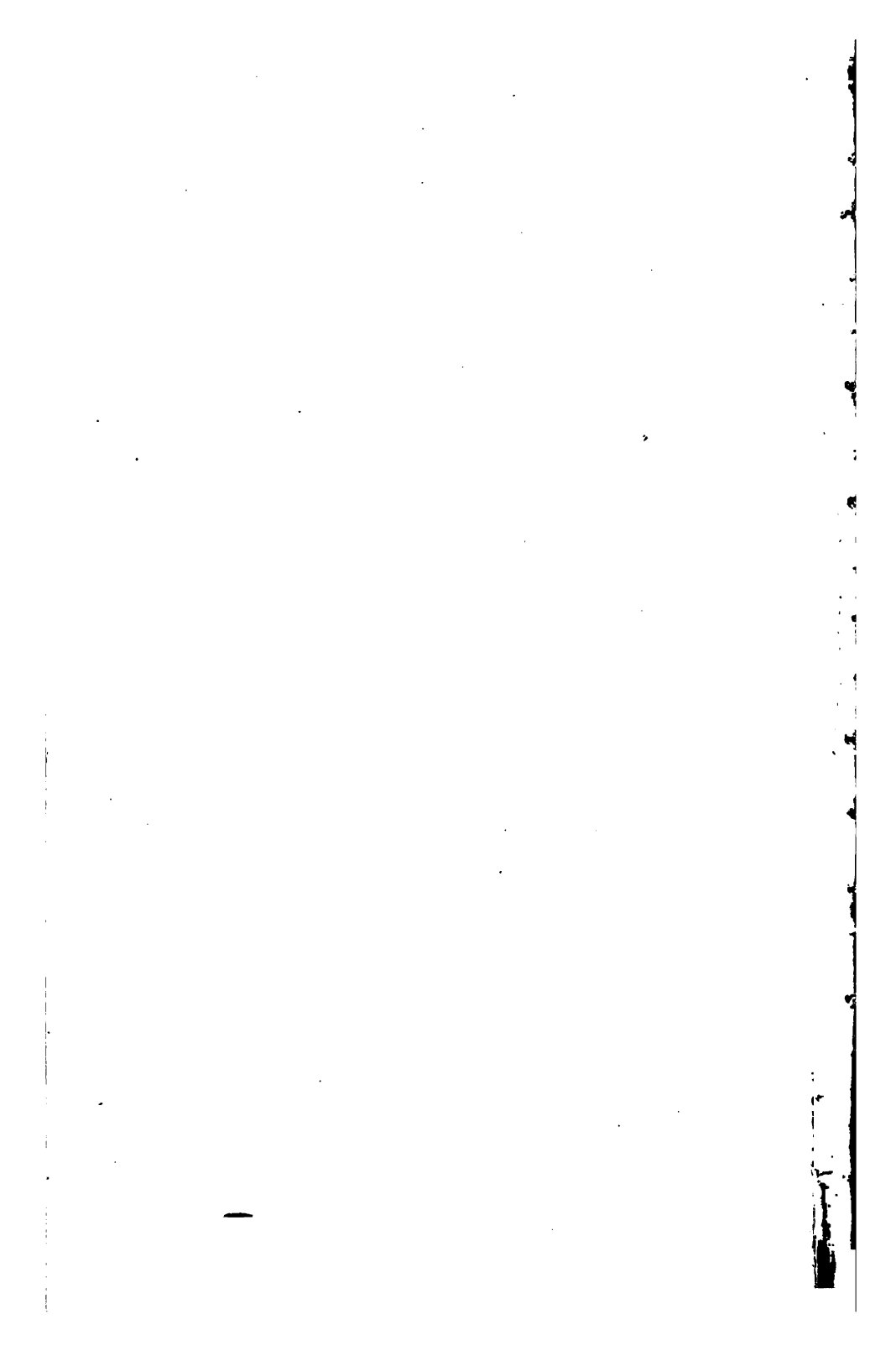
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THE  
ESSAY  
ON

WALT  
WHITMAN

BY  
ROBERT  
LOUIS  
STEVENSON

WITH A LITTLE  
JOURNEY TO THE  
HOME OF  
WHITMAN

BY  
ELBERT HUBBARD

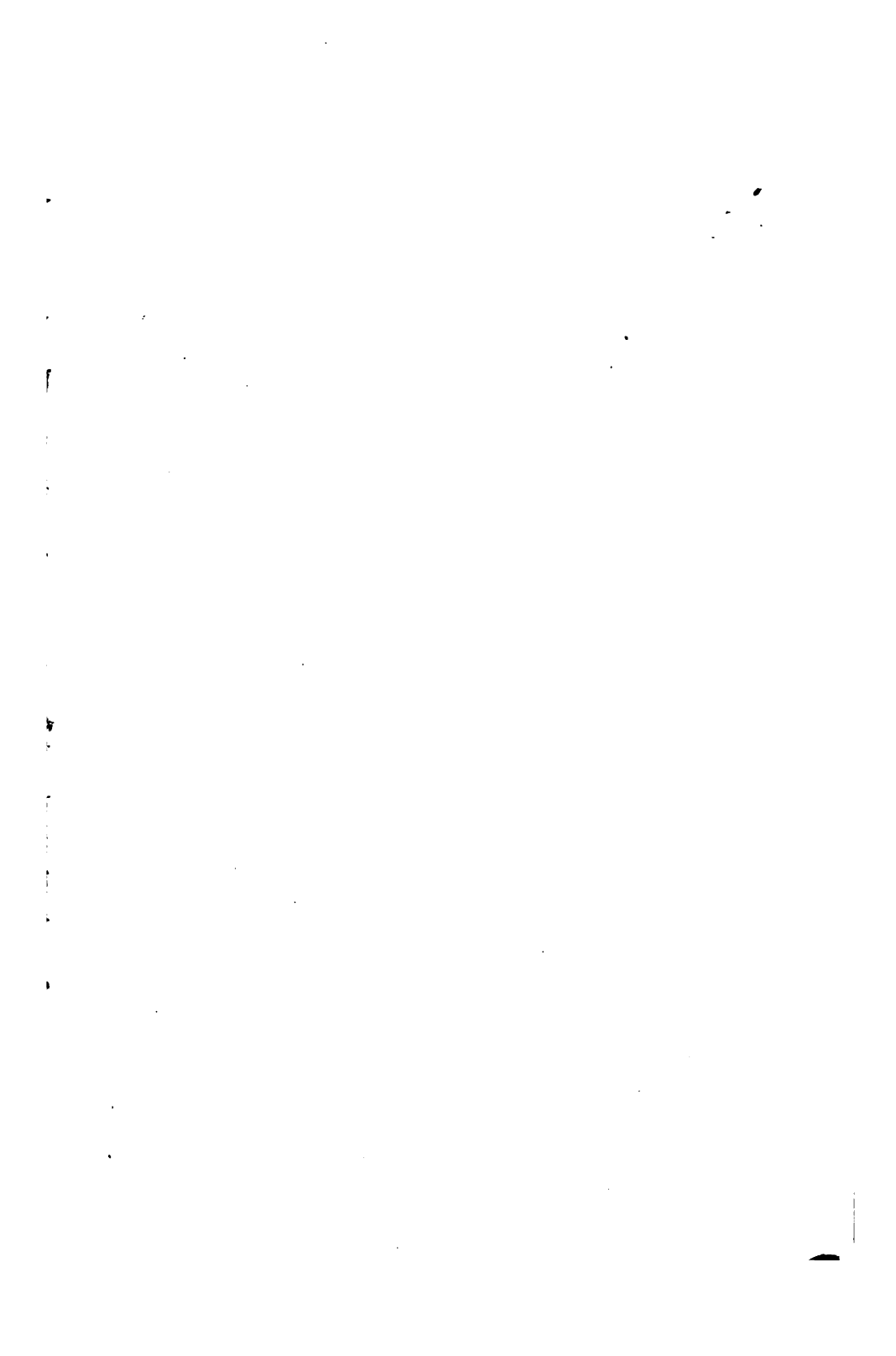


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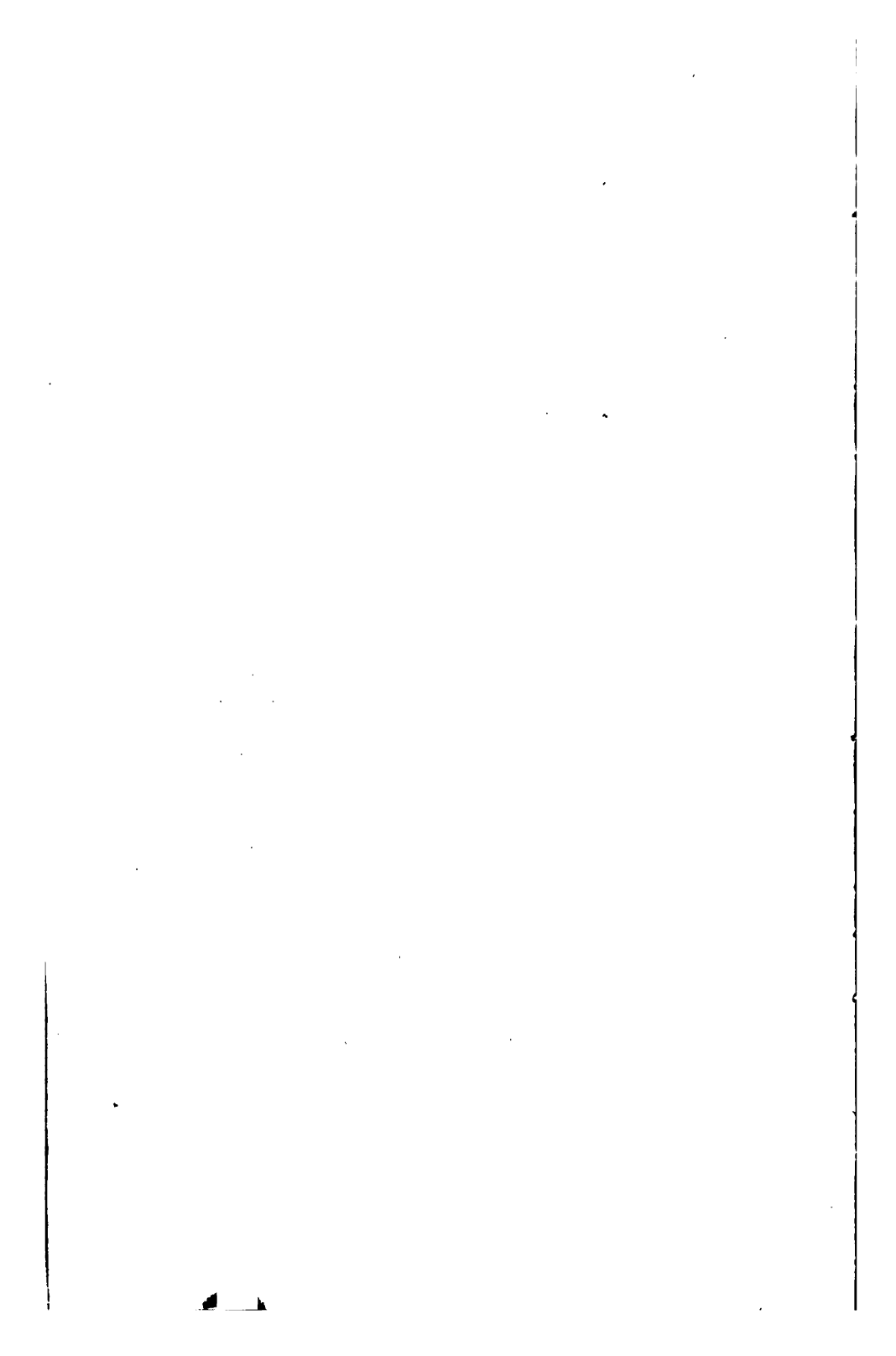
I can repeat over to men and women, You  
have done such good to me I would do  
the same to you,

I will recruit for myself and you as I go.

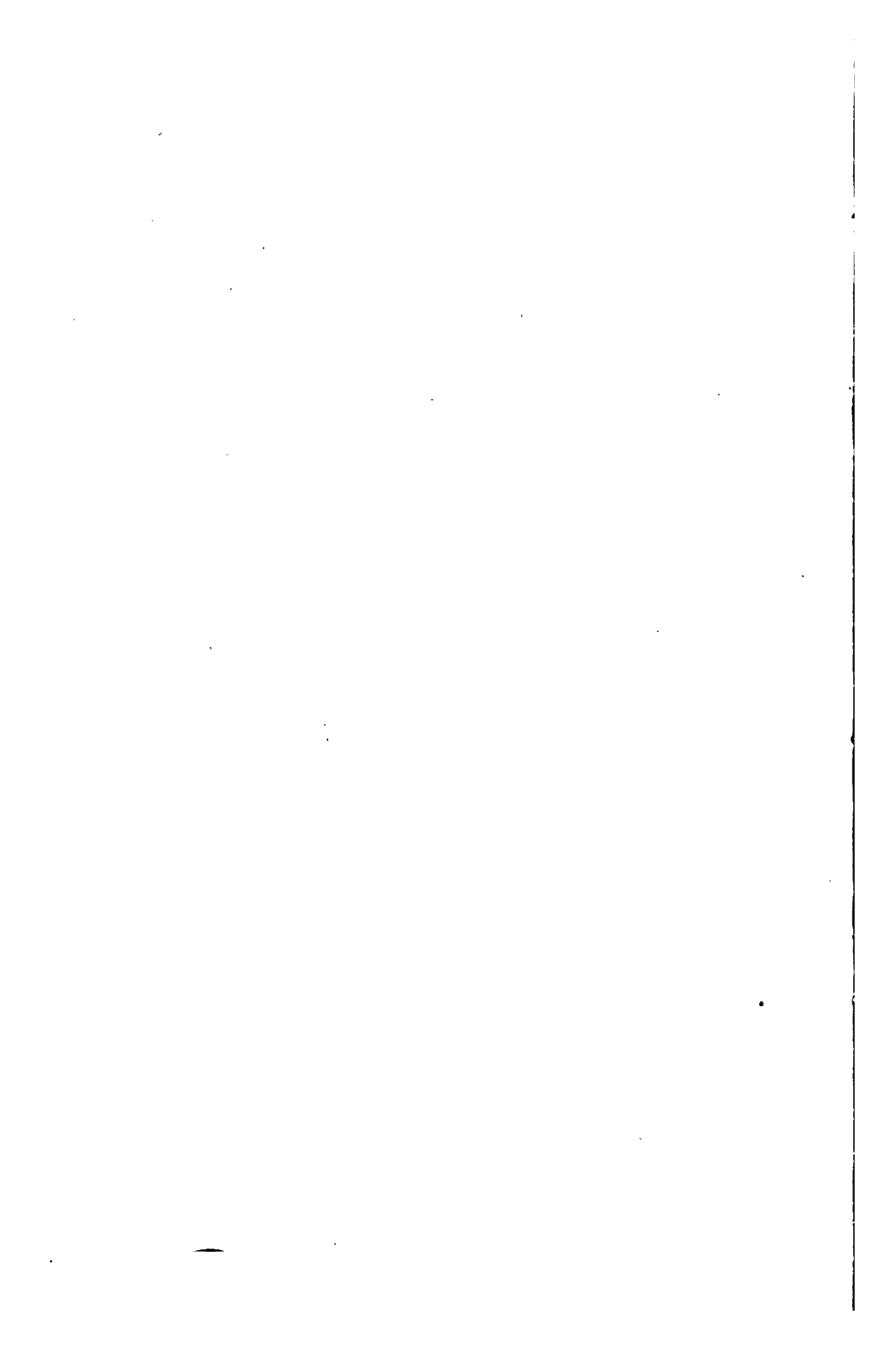
I will scatter myself among men and women  
as I go,

I will toss a new gladness and roughness,  
among them.

—Song of the Open Road.



**A LITTLE JOURNEY  
TO THE HOME OF WHITMAN**



**M**

AX NORDAU wrote a book—WALT  
wrote it with his tongue in his WHITMAN  
cheek, a dash of vitriol in the

ink, & with a pen that scratched.

¶ And the first critic who seemed to place a just estimate on the work was Mr. Zangwill (who has no Christian name). Mr. Zangwill made an attempt to swear out a "writ de lunatico inquirendo" against his Jewish brother, on the ground that the first symptom of insanity is often the delusion that others are insane; and this being so, Dr. Nordau was not a safe subject to be at large. But the Assize of Public Opinion denied the petition and the dear people bought the book at from three to five dollars per copy. Printed in several languages, its sales have mounted to a hundred thousand volumes, and the author's net profit is full forty thousand dollars. No wonder it is that, with pockets full to bursting, Dr. Nordau goes out behind the house and laughs uproariously whenever he thinks of how he has worked the world!

If Dr. Talmage is the Barnum of Theology, surely we may call Dr. Nordau the Barnum of Science. His agility in manipulating facts

WALT is equal to Hermann's now-you-see-it and now-  
WHITMAN you-don't with pocket handkerchiefs. Yet Hermann's exhibition is worth the admittance fee, and Nordau's book (seemingly written in collaboration with Jules Verne and Mark Twain) would be cheap for a dollar. But what I object to is Prof. Hermann's disciples posing as Sure-Enough Materializing Mediums and Prof. Lombroso's followers calling themselves Scientists, when each goes forth without scrip or purse with no other purpose than to supply themselves with both.

Yet it was Barnum himself who said that the public delights in being humbugged, and strange it is that we will not allow ourselves to be thimble-rigged without paying for the privilege.

Nordau's success hinged on his audacious assumption that the public knows nothing of the Law of Antithesis. Yet Plato explained that the opposite of things look alike, and sometimes are alike, and that was quite awhile ago.

The multitude answered: "Thou hast a devil"; Many of them said: "He hath a devil and is mad"; Festus said with a loud



voice: "Paul, thou art beside thyself." And **WALT**  
Nordau shouts in a voice more heady than **WHITMAN**  
that of Pilate, more throaty than that of  
Festus—"Mad—Whitman was—mad beyond  
the cavil of a doubt!"

In 1862, Lincoln, looking out of a window  
(before lilacs last in the dooryard bloomed)  
on one of the streets of Washington, saw a  
workingman in shirt sleeves go by. Turning  
to a friend, the President said: "There goes  
a man!" The exclamation sounds singularly  
like that of Napoleon on meeting Goethe.  
But the Corsican's remark was intended for  
the poet's ear, while Lincoln did not know  
who his man was, although he came to know  
him afterward.

Lincoln in his early days was a workingman  
—an athlete, and he never quite got the idea  
out of his head (and I am glad) that he was  
still a hewer of wood. He once told George  
William Curtis that he more than half ex-  
pected yet to go back to the farm and earn  
his daily bread by the work that his hands  
found to do; he dreamed of it nights, and  
whenever he saw a splendid toiler, he felt like  
hailing the man as brother and striking hands

**WALT** with him. When Lincoln saw Whitman stroll-  
**WHITMAN** ing majestically past, he took him for a stevedore or possibly the foreman of a construction gang.

Whitman was fifty-one years old then. His long flowing beard was snow white and the shock that covered his Jove-like head was iron grey. His form was that of an Apollo who had arrived at years of discretion. He weighed even two hundred pounds and was just six feet high. His plain check cotton shirt was open at the throat to the breast ; and he had an independence, a self-sufficiency, and withal a cleanliness, a sweetness, a gentleness, that told that although he had a giant's strength he did not use it like a giant. Whitman used no tobacco, neither did he apply hot and rebellious liquors to his blood and with unblushing forehead woo the means of debility and disease. Up to his fifty-third year he had never known a sick day, although at thirty his hair had begun to whiten. He had the look of age in his youth and the look of youth in his age that often marks the exceptional man. But at fifty-three his splendid health was crowded to the breaking strain. How ? Through

caring for wounded, sick and dying men: **WALT**  
hour after hour, day after day, through the **WHITMAN**  
long silent watches of the night. From 1864  
to the day of his death in 1892, physically,  
he was a man in ruins. But he did not wither  
at the top. Through it all he held the healthy  
optimism of boyhood, carrying with him the  
perfume of the morning and the lavish heart  
of youth.

Doctor Bucke, who has been superintendent of  
a hospital for the insane for twenty years, and  
the intimate friend of Whitman all the time,  
has said: "His build, his stature, his excep-  
tional health of mind and body, the size and  
form of his features, his cleanliness of mind  
and body, the grace of his movements and  
gestures, the grandeur, and especially the mag-  
netism of his presence; the charm of his  
voice, his genial kindly humor; the simplicity  
of his habits and tastes, his freedom from con-  
vention, the largeness and beauty of his man-  
ner; his calmness and majesty; his charity &  
forbearance—his entire unresentfulness under  
whatever provocation; his liberality, his uni-  
versal sympathy with humanity in all ages and  
lands, his broad tolerance, his catholic friend-

**WALT** liness, and his unexampled faculty of attract-  
**WHITMAN** ing affection, all prove his perfectly proportioned manliness."

But Whitman differed from the disciple of Lombroso in two notable particulars: He had no quarrel with the world, and he did not wax rich. "One thing thou lackest, O Walt Whitman!" we might have said to the poet, "you are not a financier." He died poor. But this is not proof of degeneracy, save on 'Change. When the children of Count Tolstoy endeavored to have him adjudged insane, the Court denied the application and voiced the wisest decision that ever came out of Russia: A man who gives away his money is not necessarily more foolish than he who saves it.

And with Mr. Horace L. Traubel I say: Whitman was the sanest man I ever saw.



OME men make themselves **WALT**  
homes ; and others there be who **WHITMAN**  
rent rooms. Walt Whitman was

essentially a citizen of the world :  
the world was his home and

mankind were his friends. There was a quality  
in the man peculiarly universal : a strong, vi-  
rile poise that asked for nothing, but took  
what it needed.

He loved men as brothers, yet his brothers  
after the flesh understood him not ; he loved  
children—they turned to him instinctively—  
but he had no children of his own ; he loved  
women and yet this strongly sexed and manly  
man never loved a woman. And I might here  
say as Philip Gilbert Hamerton said of Tur-  
ner, “ He was lamentably unfortunate in this :  
throughout his whole life he never came un-  
der the ennobling and refining influence of a  
good woman.”

It requires two to make a home. The first  
home was made when a woman, cradling in  
her loving arms a baby, crooned a lullaby. All  
the tender sentimentality we throw around a  
place is the result of the sacred thought that  
we live there with some one else. It is our

**WALT** home. The home is a tryst—the place where  
**WHITMAN** we retire and shut the world out. Lovers  
make a home just as birds make a nest, and  
unless a man knows the spell of the divine  
passion I hardly see how he can have a home  
at all. He only rents a room.

Camden is separated from the city of Philadelphia by the Delaware River. Camden lies low & flat—a great sandy, monotonous waste of straggling buildings. Here and there are straight rows of cheap houses, evidently erected by staid, broad-brimmed speculators from across the river, with eyes on the main chance. But they reckoned ill, for the town did not boom. Some of these houses have marble steps and white barn-door shutters, that might withstand a seige. When a funeral takes place in one of these houses the shutters are tied with strips of mournful black alpaca for a year and a day. Engineers, dockmen, express drivers, and mechanics largely make up citizens of Camden. Of course, Camden has its smug corner where prosperous merchants most do congregate: where they play croquet in the front yards, and have window boxes, and a piano and veranda chairs and terra cotta stat-



uary, but for the most part the houses of WALT  
Camden are rented, and rented cheap.

W H I T M A N

Many of the domiciles are frame and have the happy tumble-down look of the back streets in Charleston or Richmond—those streets where white trash merges off into prosperous colored aristocracy. Old hats do duty in keeping out the fresh air where providence has interfered and broken out a pane; blinds hang by a single hinge; bricks on the chimney tops threaten the passers-by; stringers and posts mark the place where proud picket fences once stood—the pickets having gone for kindling long ago. In the warm summer evenings men in shirt-sleeves sit on the front steps and stolidly smoke, while the children pile up sand in the streets and play in the gutters.

Parallel with Mickle Street, a block away, are railway tracks. There noisy switch engines, that never keep Sabbath, puff back and forth, day and night, sending forth showers of soot and smoke when the wind is right (and it usually is) straight over Number 328, where, according to John Addington Symonds and William Michael Rossetti, lived the mightiest

WALT seer of the century—the man whom they  
WHITMAN rank with Socrates, Epictetus, St. Paul, Michael Angelo, and Dante.

It was in August of 1883 that I first walked up that little street—a hot sultry summer evening. There had been a shower that turned the dust of the unpaved roadway to mud. The air was close and muggy. The houses, built right up to the sidewalks, over which in little gutters the steaming sewage ran, seemed to have discharged their occupants into the street to enjoy the cool of the day. Barefooted children by the score paddled in the mud. All the steps were filled with loungers; some of the men had discarded not only coats but shirts as well and now sat in flaming red underwear, holding babies.

They say that “woman’s work is never done,” but to the women of Mickle Street this does not apply, but stay! perhaps their work is never done. Anyway, I remember that women sat on the curbs in calico dresses or leaned out of the windows, and all seemed supremely free from care.

“Can you tell me where Mr. Whitman lives?” I asked a portly dame who was rest-

ing her elbows on a window-sill near by. WALT

"Who?"

WHITMAN

"Mr. Whitman!"

"You mean Walt Whitman?"

"Yes."

"Show the gentleman, Molly, he 'll give you a nickel, I 'm sure!"

I had not seen Molly. She stood behind me, but as her mother spoke she seized tight hold of one of my fingers, claiming me as her lawful prey, and all the other children looked on with envious eyes as little Molly threw at them glances of scorn and marched me off. Molly was five, going on six, she told me. She had bright red hair, a grimy face and little chapped feet that made not a sound as we walked. She got her nickel and carried it in her mouth and this made conversation difficult. After going one block she suddenly stopped, squared me around and pointing said, "Them is he!" and disappeared.

In a wheeled rattan chair, in the hallway, a little back from the door of a plain weather-beaten house, sat the coatless philosopher, his face and head wreathed in a tumult of snow-white hair.

**WALT** I had a little speech, all prepared weeks before and committed to memory, that I intended to repeat, telling him how I had read his poems and admired them. And further I had stored away in my mind a few blades from "Leaves of Grass" that I proposed to bring out at the right time as a sort of certificate of character. But when that little girl jerked me right-about-face and heartlessly deserted me, I stared dumbly at the man whom I had come a hundred miles to see. I began angling for my little speech, but could not fetch it.

"Hello!" called the philosopher, out of the white aureole; "Hello! come here, boy!"

¶ He held out his hand, and there was a grasp with meaning in it.

"Don't go yet, Joe," he said to a man seated on the step, smoking a cob pipe.

"The old woman 's calling me," said the swarthy Joe. Joe evidently held truth lightly.

"So long, Walt!"

"Good-bye, Joe. Sit down, lad, sit down!"

¶ I sat in the doorway at his feet.

"Now is n't it queer—that fellow is a regular philosopher and works out some great

problems, but he 's ashamed to express 'em. WALT  
He could no more give you his best than he WHITMAN  
could fly. Ashamed I s'pose, ashamed of the  
best that is in him. We are all a little that  
way—all but me—(I try to write my best, re-  
gardless of whether the thing sounds ridicu-  
lous or not—regardless of what others think  
or say or have said.) Ashamed of our holiest,  
truest, and best! Is it not too bad?

“ You are twenty-five now? Well boy, you  
may grow until you are thirty and then you  
will be as wise as you ever will be. Have n't  
you noticed that men of sixty have no clearer  
vision than men of forty? One reason is that  
we have been taught that we know all about  
life and death and the mysteries of the grave.  
But the main reason is that we are ashamed  
to shove out and be ourselves. Jesus expressed  
his own individuality perhaps more than any  
man we know of, and so he wields a wider  
influence than any other. And this though we  
only have a record of just twenty-seven days  
of his life.

“ Now that fellow that just left is an engineer,  
and he dreams some beautiful dreams, but he  
never expresses them to any one, only hints

WALT them to me, and this only at twilight. He is  
WHITMAN like a weasel or mink or a whip-poor-will, he  
comes out only at night.

“ ‘ If the weather was like this all the time, people would never learn to read and write,’ said Joe to me just as you arrived. And is n’t that so? Here we can count a hundred people up and down this street, and not one is reading, not one but that is just lolling about, except the children and they are only happy when playing in the dirt. Why if this tropical weather should continue we would all slip back into South Sea Islanders! You can only raise good men in a little strip around the North Temperate Zone—when you get out of the track of the glacier a tender hearted, sympathetic man of brains is an accident.”

¶ The old man suddenly ceased and I imagined that he was following the thought out in his own mind. We sat silent for a space. The twilight fell, and the lamp-lighter lit the street lamp on the corner. He stopped an instant to cheerily salute the poet as he passed. The man sitting on the doorstep, across the street, smoking, knocked the ashes out of his pipe on his boot-heel & went indoors. Women



called their children, who did not respond, **WALT**  
but still played on. Then the creepers were **WHITMAN**  
carried in, to be fed their bread and milk and  
put to bed ; and shortly shrill feminine voices  
ordered the older children indoors, and some  
obeyed.

The night crept slowly on.

I heard old Walt chuckle behind me, talking  
incoherently to himself, and then he said :

“ You are wondering why I live in such a  
place as this ? ”

“ Yes, that is exactly what I was thinking  
of ! ”

“ You think I belong in the country, in some  
quiet shady place. But all I have to do is to  
shut my eyes and go there. No man loves the  
woods more than I—I was born within sound  
of the sea—down on Long Island, and I know  
all the songs that the sea-shell sings. But this  
babble and babel of voices pleases me better,  
especially since my legs went on a strike, for  
although I can’t walk, you see I still mix  
with the throng, so I suffer no loss. In the  
woods a man must be all hands and feet. I  
like the folks, the plain, ignorant, unpreten-  
tious folks ; and the youngsters that come and

**WALT** slide on my cellar door do not disturb me a  
**WHITMAN** bit. I 'm different from Carlyle—you know  
he had a noise-proof room where he locked  
himself in. Now when a huckster goes by,  
crying his wares, I open the blinds and often  
wrangle with the fellow over the price of  
things. But the rogues have got into a way  
lately of leaving truck for me and refusing  
pay. To-day an Irishman passed in three  
quarts of berries and walked off pretending  
to be mad because I offered to pay. When he  
was gone, I beckoned to the babies over the  
way—they came over and we had a feast.

“Yes, I like the folks around here; I like  
the women, and I like the men, and I like  
the babies, and I like the youngsters that play  
in the alley and make mud pies on my steps.  
I expect to stay here until I die.”

“You speak of death as a matter of course—  
you are not afraid to die?”

“Oh, no, my boy, death is as natural as life,  
and a deal kinder. But it is all good—I accept  
it all and give thanks—you have not forgotten  
my chant to death?”

“Not I?”

I repeated a few lines from “Drum Taps.”

He followed me, rapping gently with his cane **WALT**  
on the floor, and with little interjectory re- **WHITMAN**  
marks of "That 's so!" "Very true!"  
"Good, good!" And when I faltered and  
lost the lines he picked them up where "The  
voice of my spirit tallied the song of the  
bird." In a strong clear voice but a voice full  
of sublime feeling he repeated :

Come, lovely and soothing Death,  
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving,  
arriving

In the day, in the night, to all, to each,  
Sooner or later, delicate Death.

Praised be the fathomless universe

For life and joy, and for objects and knowl-  
edge curious,

And for love, sweet love—but praise ! praise !  
praise

For the sure enwinding arms of cool, en-  
folding Death.

Dark Mother, always gliding near with soft  
feet,

Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest  
welcome ?

Then I chant for thee, I glorify thee above all,  
I bring thee a song that when thou must in-  
deed come, come unfalteringly,

Approach, strong deliveress,

WALT  
WHITMAN

When it is so, when thou hast taken them  
I joyously sing the dead,  
Lost in the loving, floating ocean of thee,  
Laved in the flood of thy bliss, O Death.  
From me to thee glad serenades,  
Dances for thee I propose, saluting thee,  
adornments and feastings for thee,  
And the sights of the open landscape and the  
high spread sky are fitting,  
And life and the fields, and the huge and  
thoughtful night.  
The night in silence under many a star,  
The ocean shore and the husky whispering  
wave whose voice I know,  
And the soul turning to thee, O vast and well  
veil'd Death,  
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.  
Over the tree-tops I float thee a song,  
Over the rising and sinking waves, over the  
myriad fields and the prairies wide,  
Over the dense-packed cities all, & the teem-  
ing wharves, and ways,  
I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee O  
Death.

The last playing youngster had silently disap-  
peared from the streets. The doorsteps were  
deserted—save where across the way a young  
man and maiden sat in the gloaming con-  
versing in low monotone.

¶ The clouds had drifted away.

A great yellow star shown out above the chimney tops in the east.

I arose to go.

“I wish you ’d come oftener—I see you so seldom, lad,” said the old man, half plaintively.

I did not explain that we had never met before—that I had come from New York purposely to see him. He thought he knew me. And so he did—as much as I could impart. The rest was irrelevant. As to my occupation or name, what boot it?—he had no curiosity concerning me. I grasped his outstretched hand in both of my own.

He said not a word ; neither did I.

I turned and made my way to the ferry—past the whispering lovers on the doorsteps, and over the railway tracks where the noisy engines puffed. As I walked on board the boat the wind blew up cool and fresh from the west. The star in the east grew brighter, and other stars came out, reflecting themselves like gems in the dark blue of the Delaware.

¶ There was a soft sublimity in the sound of the bells that came echoing over the waters.

WALT  
WHITMAN

WALT  
WHITMAN



MOST writers bear no message : they carry no torch. Sometimes they excite wonder, or they may amuse and divert — divert us from our work. To be diverted

to a certain degree may be well, but there is a point where earth ends and cloudland begins, and even great poets occasionally befog the things which they would reveal.

Homer was seemingly blind to much simple truth ; Virgil carries you away from earth ; Horace was undone without his Macænas ; Dante makes you an exile ; Shakespeare was singularly silent concerning the doubts, difficulties, and common lives of common people ; Byron's Corsair life does not help you in your toil, and in his fight with English Bards and Scotch Reviewers we crave neutrality ; to be caught in the meshes of Pope's "Dunciad" is not pleasant ; and Lowell's "Fable for Critics" is only another "Dunciad." But above all poets who have ever lived, the author of "Leaves of Grass" was the poet of humanity.

Milton knew all about Heaven, and Dante conducts us through Hell, but it was left for



Whitman to show us Earth. His voice never **WALT**  
goes so high that it breaks in impotent fal- **WHITMAN**  
setto, neither does it growl and snarl at things

it does not understand, and not understanding does not like. He was so great that he had no envy, and his insight was so sure that he had no prejudice. He never boasted that he was higher, nor claimed to be less than any of the other sons of men. He met all on terms of absolute equality, mixing with the poor, the lowly, the fallen, the oppressed, the cultured, the rich—simply as brother with brother. And when he said to the outcast, "Not till the sun excludes you will I exclude you," he voiced a sentiment worthy of a god.

He was brother to the elements, the mountains, the seas, the clouds, the sky. He loved them all and partook of them all in his large, free, unselfish, untrammelled nature. His heart knew no limits, and feeling his feet mortis'd in granite and his footsteps tenon'd in infinity he knew the amplitude of time.

Only the great are generous; only the strong are forgiving. Like Lot's wife, most poets look back over their shoulders; and those who are not looking backward insist that we shall

**WALT** look into the future, and the vast majority of  
**WHITMAN** the whole scribbling rabble accept the precept, "Man never is, but always to be blest."

¶ We grieve for childhood's happy days, and long for sweet rest in Heaven and sigh for mansions in the skies. And the people about us seem so indifferent, and our friends so lukewarm; and really no one understands us, and our environment queers our budding spirituality and the frost of jealousy nips our aspirations: "O Paradise, O Paradise, the world is growing old; who would not be at rest and free where love is never cold." So sing the fearsome dyspeptics of the stylus. O anæmic he, you bloodless she, nipping at crackers, sipping at tea, why not consider that although the evolutionists tell us where we came from and the theologians inform us where we are going to, yet the only thing we are really sure of is that we are here! ¶ The present is the perpetually moving spot where history ends and prophecy begins. It is our only possession: the past we reach through lapsing memory, halting recollection, hearsay & belief; we pierce the future by wistful faith or anxious hope, but the present is beneath our feet.

Whitman sings the beauty and the glory of **WALT**  
the present. He rebukes our groans and sighs **WHITMAN**  
—bids us look about on every side at the  
wonders of creation, and at the miracles with-  
in our grasp. He lifts us up, restores us to our  
own, introduces us to man and Nature and  
thus infuses into us courage, manly pride, self-  
reliance, and the strong faith that comes when  
we feel our kinship with God.

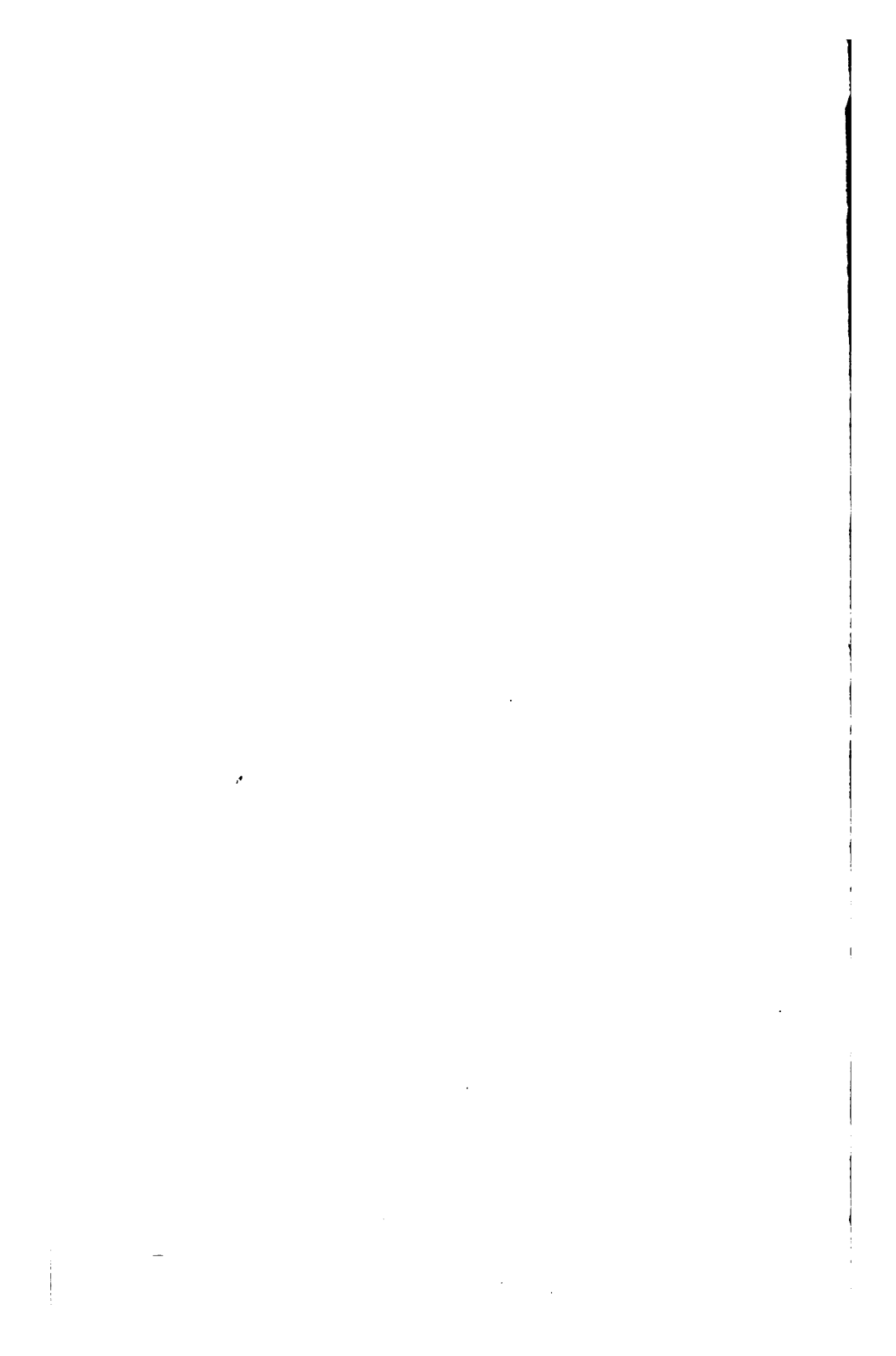
He was so mixed with the universe that his  
voice took on the sway of elemental integ-  
rity and candor. Absolutely honest, this man  
was unafraid and unashamed, for Nature has  
neither apprehension, shame, nor vain-glory.  
In "Leaves of Grass" Whitman speaks as all  
men have ever spoken who believe in God &  
in themselves—oracular, without apology,  
without abasement—fearlessly. He tells of the  
powers and mysteries that pervade and guide  
all life, all death, all purpose. His work is  
masculine, as the sun is masculine; for the  
prophetic voice is as surely masculine as the  
lullaby and lyric cry are feminine.

Whitman brings the warmth of the sun to  
the buds of the heart so that they open and  
bring forth form, color, perfume. He becomes

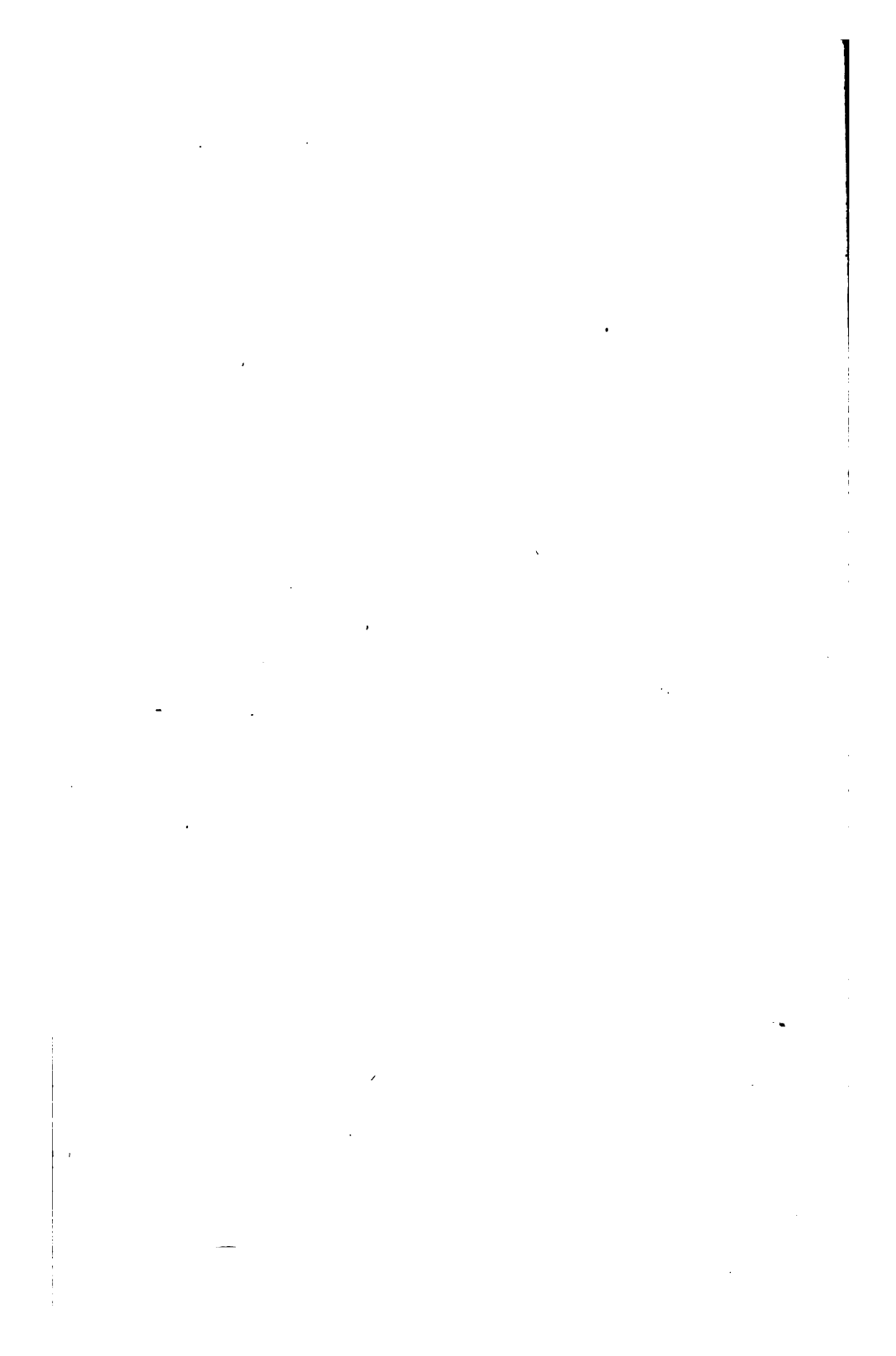
**WALT** for them aliment and dew; so these buds be-  
**WHITMAN** come blossoms, fruits, tall branches, & stately  
trees that cast refreshing shadows.

There are men who are to other men as the  
shadow of a mighty rock in a weary land—  
such is Walt Whitman.





**WALT WHITMAN**







OF late years the name of WALT  
Walt Whitman has been a WHITMAN  
good deal bandied about  
in books and magazines.

It has become familiar both in good and ill repute. His works have been largely bespattered with praise by his admirers, and cruelly mauled and mangled by irreverent enemies. Now, whether his poetry is good or bad as poetry, is a matter that may admit of a difference of opinion without alienating those who differ. We could not keep the peace with a man who should put forward claims to taste and yet depreciate the choruses in "Samson Agonistes"; but I think we may shake hands with one who sees no more in Walt Whitman's volume, from a literary point of view, than a farrago of incompetent essays in a wrong direction. That may not be at all our own opinion. We may

WALT think that, when a work contains so  
WHITMAN many unforgettable phrases, it cannot  
be altogether devoid of literary merit. We may even see passages of a high poetry here and there among its eccentric contents. But when all is said, Walt Whitman is neither a Milton nor a Shakespeare; to appreciate his works is not a condition necessary to salvation; and I would not disinherit a son upon the question, nor even think much the worse of a critic, for I should always have an idea what he meant.

What Whitman has to say is another affair from how he says it. It is not possible to acquit any one of defective intelligence, or else stiff prejudice, who is not interested by Whitman's matter and the spirit it represents. Not as a poet, but as what we must call (for lack of a more exact expression) a prophet, he occupies a

curious & prominent position. Whether he may greatly influence the future or not, he is a notable symptom of the present. As a sign of the times, it would be hard to find his parallel. I should hazard a large wager, for instance, that he was not unacquainted with the works of Herbert Spencer; and yet where, in all the history books, shall we lay our hands on two more incongruous contemporaries? Mr. Spencer so decorous—I had almost said, so dandy—in dissent; and Whitman, like a large shaggy dog, just unchained, scours the beaches of the world, baying at the moon. And when was an echo more curiously like a satire, than when Mr. Spencer found his Synthetic Philosophy reverberated from the other shores of the Atlantic in the “barbaric yawp” of Whitman?

WALT  
WHITMAN



HAT Whitman writes up to a system, it cannot be too soon explained. He was a theorizer about society before he was a poet. He first perceived something wanting, & then sat down squarely to supply the want. The reader, running over his works, will find that he takes nearly as much pleasure in critically expounding his theory of poetry as in making poems. This is as far as it can be from the case of the spontaneous village minstrel dear to elegy, who has no theory whatever, although sometimes, he may have fully as much poetry as Whitman. The whole of Whitman's work is deliberate and preconceived. A man born into a society comparatively new, full of conflicting elements and interests, could not fail, if he had any thoughts at all, to reflect upon the tendencies around him. He

saw much good and evil on all sides, WALT  
not yet settled down into some more WHITMAN  
or less unjust compromise as in older  
nations, but still in the act of settle-  
ment. And he could not but wonder  
what it would turn out; whether the  
compromise would be very just or  
very/much the reverse, and give great  
or little scope for healthy human en-  
ergies. From idle wonder to active  
speculation is but a step; & he seems  
to have been early struck with the  
inefficacy of literature and its ex-  
treme unsuitability to the conditions.  
What he calls "Feudal Literature"  
could have little living action on the  
tumult of American democracy; what  
he calls the "Literature of Wo,"  
meaning the whole tribe of Werther  
and Byron, could have no action for  
good in any time or place. Both prop-  
ositions, if art/had none but a direct  
moral influence, would be true

WALT enough; and as this seems to be  
WHITMAN Whitman's view, they were true  
enough for him. (He conceived the  
idea of a Literature which was to in-  
here in the life of the present; which  
was to be, first, human, and next,  
American;) which was to be brave &  
cheerful as per contract, to give cul-  
ture in a popular and poetical pre-  
sentment; and, in so doing, catch &  
stereotype some democratic ideal of  
humanity which should be equally  
natural to all grades of wealth and  
education, and suited, in one of his  
favorite phrases, to "the average  
man." To the formation of some  
such literature as this his poems are  
to be regarded as so many contribu-  
tions, one sometimes explaining, some-  
times superceding, the other: and the  
whole together not so much a finished  
work as a body of suggestive hints.  
He does not profess to have built, the

castle, but he pretends he has traced WALT the lines of the foundation. He has WHITMAN not made the poetry, but he flatters himself he has done something towards making the poets.

His notion of the poetic function is ambitious, & coincides roughly with what Schopenhauer has laid down as the province of the metaphysician.

The poet is to gather together for men, and set in order, the materials of their existence. He is "The Answerer"; he is to find some way of speaking about life that shall satisfy, if only for the moment, man's enduring astonishment at his own position. And besides having an answer ready, it is he who shall provoke the question. He must shake people out of their indifference, and force them to make some election in this world, instead of sliding dully forward in a dream. Life is a business we are all

WALT apt to mismanage; either living reck-  
WHITMAN lessly from day to day, or suffering  
ourselves to be gulled, out of our  
moments by the inanities of custom.  
We should despise a man who gave  
as little activity and forethought to  
the conduct of any other business.  
But in this, which is the one thing of  
all others, since it contains them all,  
we cannot see the forest for the trees.  
One brief impression obliterates an-  
other. There is something stupefying  
in the recurrence of unimportant  
things. And it is only on rare provo-  
cations that we can rise to take an  
outlook beyond daily concerns, and  
comprehend the narrow limits and  
great possibilities of our existence. It  
is the duty of the poet to induce such  
moments of clear sight. He is the  
declared enemy of all living by re-  
flex action, of all that is done be-  
twixt sleep and waking, of all the



pleasureless pleasurings and imaginary **WALT**  
duties in which we coin away our **WHITMAN**  
hearts and fritter invaluable years. He  
has to electrify his readers into an in-  
stant unflagging activity, founded on  
a wide and eager observation of the  
world, and make them direct their  
ways by a superior prudence, which  
has little or nothing in common with  
the maxims of the copy-book. That  
many of us lead such lives as they  
would heartily disown after two hours'  
serious reflection on the subject is, I  
am afraid, a true, and I am sure, a  
very galling thought. The Enchanted  
Ground of dead-alive respectability is  
next, upon the map, to the Beulah  
of considerate virtue. But there they  
all slumber and take their rest in the  
middle of God's beautiful and won-  
derful universe; the drowsy heads  
have nodded together in the same  
position since first their fathers fell

WALT asleep ; and not even the sound of  
WHITMAN the last trumpet can wake them to  
a single active thought. The poet has  
a hard task before him to stir up such  
fellows to a sense of their own and  
other people's principles in life.

And it happens that literature is, in  
some ways, but an indifferent means  
to such an end. Language is but a  
poor bull's-eye lantern wherewith to  
show off the vast cathedral of the  
world ; and yet a particular thing  
once said in words is so definite and  
memorable, that it makes us forget  
the absence of the many which re-  
main unexpressed ; like a bright win-  
dow in a distant view, which dazzles  
& confuses our sight of its surround-  
ings. There are not words enough in  
all Shakespeare to express the merest  
fraction of a man's experience in an  
hour. The speed of the eyesight and  
the hearing, and the continual in-

dustry of the mind, produce, in ten WALT  
minutes, what it would require a la- WHITMAN  
borious volume to shadow forth by  
comparisons & roundabout approach-  
es. If verbal logic were sufficient, life  
would be as plain sailing as a piece  
of Euclid. But, as a matter of fact,  
we make a travesty of the simplest  
process of thought when we put it  
into words ; for the words are all col-  
ored and forsworn, apply inaccurately,  
and bring with them, from former  
uses, ideas of praise and blame that  
have nothing to do with the question  
in hand. So we must always see to it  
nearly, that we judge by the realities  
of life and not by the partial terms  
that represent them in man's speech ;  
and at times of choice, we must leave  
words upon one side, and act upon  
those brute convictions, unexpressed  
and perhaps inexpressible, which can-  
not be flourished in an argument, but

WALT which are truly the sum and fruit of  
WHITMAN our experience. Words are for communication, not for judgment. This is what every thoughtful man knows for himself, for only fools and silly schoolmasters push definitions over far into the domain of conduct; and the majority of women, not learned in these scholastic refinements, live all-of-a-piece and unconsciously, as a tree grows, without caring to put a name upon their acts or motives. Hence, a new difficulty for Whitman's scrupulous and argumentative poet; he must do more than waken up the sleepers to his words; he must persuade them to look over the book and at life with their own eyes.

This side of truth is ever present to Whitman; it is this that he means when he tells us that "To glance with an eye confounds the learning of all times." But he is not unready.

He is never weary of descanting on WALT the undebatable conviction that is WHITMAN forced upon our minds by the presence of other men, of animals, or of inanimate things. To glance with an eye, were it only at a chair or a park railing, is by far a more persuasive process, and brings us to a far more exact conclusion, than to read the works of all the logicians extant. If both, by a large allowance, may be said to end in certainty, the certainty in the one case transcends the other to an incalculable degree. If people see a lion, they run away; if they only apprehend a deduction, they keep wandering around in an experimental humor. Now, how is the poet to convince like nature, and not like books? Is there no actual piece of nature that he can show the man to his face, as he might show him a tree if they were walking together? Yes,

WALT there is one: the man's own thoughts.

WHITMAN In fact, if the poet is to speak efficaciously, he must say what is already in his hearer's mind. That, alone, the hearer will believe; that, alone, he will be able to apply intelligently to the facts of life. Any conviction, even if it be a whole system or a whole religion, must pass into the condition of commonplace, or postulate, before it becomes fully operative. Strange excursions and high-flying theories may interest, but they cannot rule behavior. Our faith is not the highest truth that we perceive, but the highest that we have been able to assimilate into the very texture & method of our thinking. It is not, therefore, by flashing before a man's eyes the weapons of dialectic; it is not by induction, deduction, or construction; it is not by forcing him on from one stage of reasoning to another, that

the man will be effectually renewed. WALT  
He cannot be made to believe any- WHITMAN  
thing; but he can be made to see  
that he has always believed it. And  
this is the practical canon. It is when  
the reader cries, "Oh, I know!" and  
is, perhaps, half irritated to see how  
nearly the author has forestalled his  
own thoughts, that he is on the way  
to what is called in theology a Saving  
Faith.

Here we have the key to Whitman's  
attitude. To give a certain unity of  
ideal to the average population of  
America—to gather their activities  
about some conception of humanity  
that shall be central and normal, if  
only for the moment—the poet must  
portray that population as it is. Like  
human law, human poetry is simply  
declaratory. If any ideal is possible,  
it must be already in the thoughts of  
the people; and by the same reason,

WALT in the thoughts of the poet, who is  
WHITMAN one of them. And hence Whitman's  
own formula: "The poet is individual—he is complete in himself: the others are as good as he; only he sees it, and they do not." To show them how good they are, the poet must study his fellow-countrymen & himself somewhat like a traveller on the hunt for his book of travels. There is a sense, of course, in which all true books are books of travel; and all genuine poets must run their risk of being charged with the traveller's exaggeration; for to whom are such books more surprising than to those whose own life is faithfully & smartly pictured? But this danger is all upon one side; and you may judiciously flatter the portrait without any likelihood of the sitter's disowning it for a faithful likeness. And so Whitman has reasoned: that by drawing at first



hand from himself and his neighbors, WALT  
accepting without shame the incon- WHITMAN  
sistencies and brutalities that go to  
make up man, and yet treating the  
whole in a high, magnanimous spirit,  
he would make sure of belief, and  
at the same time encourage people  
forward by the means of praise.

WALT  
WHITMAN



OWADAYS we are accustomed to a great deal of puling over the circumstances in which we are placed. The great refinement of many poetical gentlemen has rendered them practically unfit for the jostling and ugliness of life, and they record their unfitness at considerable length. The bold and awful poetry of Job's complaint produces too many flimsy imitators; for there is always something consolatory in grandeur, but the symphony transposed for the piano becomes hysterically sad. This literature of woe, as Whitman calls it, this *Maladie de Rene*, as we like to call it in Europe, is in many ways a most humiliating and sickly phenomenon. Young gentlemen with three or four hundred a year of private means look down from a pinnacle of doleful experience on all the grown & hearty

men who have dared to say a good WALT  
word for life since the beginning of WHITMAN  
the world. There is no prophet but  
the melancholy Jacques, and the blue  
devils dance on all our literary wires.

¶ It would be a poor service to  
spread culture, if this be its result,  
among the comparatively innocent  
and cheerful ranks of men. When  
our little poets have to be sent to  
look at the ploughman and learn wis-  
dom, we must be careful how we  
tamper with our ploughmen. When a  
man in not the best of circumstances  
preserves composure of mind, & rel-  
ishes ale and tobacco, and his wife  
and children, in the intervals of dull  
and unremunerative labor; where a  
man in this predicament can afford a  
lesson by the way to what are called  
his intellectual superiors, there is  
plainly something to be lost, as well  
as something to be gained, by teach-

WALT ing him to think differently. It is  
WHITMAN better to leave him as he is than to  
teach him whining. It is better that  
he should go without the cheerful  
lights of culture, if cheerless doubt  
and paralyzing sentimentalism are to  
be the consequence. Let us, by all  
means, fight against that hide-bound  
stolidity of sensation and sluggish-  
ness of mind which blurs and decol-  
orizes for poor natures the wonderful  
pageant of consciousness; let us teach  
people, as much as we can, to enjoy,  
and they will learn for themselves to  
sympathize; but let us see to it,  
above all, that we give these lessons  
in a brave, vivacious note, and build  
the man up in courage while we de-  
molish the substitute, indifference.

Whitman is alive to all this. He sees  
that, if the poet is to be of any help,  
he must testify to the livableness of  
life. His poems, he tells us, are to be

“hymns of the praise of things.” They **WALT**  
are to make for a certain high joy in **WHITMAN**  
living, or what he calls himself “a  
brave delight fit for freedom’s ath-  
letes.” And he has had no difficulty  
in introducing his optimism: it fitted  
readily enough with his system; for  
the average man is truly a courage-  
ous person and truly fond of living.  
One of Whitman’s remarks upon this  
head is worth quotation, as he is there  
perfectly successful, and does precise-  
ly what he designs to do throughout:  
Takes ordinary and even common-  
place circumstances; throws them  
out, by a happy turn of thinking,  
into significance and something like  
beauty; and tacks a hopeful moral  
lesson to the end.

“The passionate tenacity of hunters,  
woodmen, early risers, cultivators of  
gardens and orchards and fields, the  
love of healthy women for the manly

WALT form, seafaring persons, drivers of  
WHITMAN horses, the passion for light and the  
open air,—all is an old unvaried sign  
of the unfailing perception of beauty,  
and of a residence of the poetic in  
outdoor people.”

There seems to be something truly  
original in this choice of trite exam-  
ples. You will remark how adroitly  
Whitman begins, hunters and wood-  
men being confessedly romantic. And  
one thing more. If he had said “the  
love of healthy men for the female  
form,” he would have said almost a  
silliness; for the thing has never been  
dissembled out of delicacy, and is so  
obvious as to be a public nuisance.  
But by reversing it, he tells us some-  
thing not unlike news; something  
that sounds quite freshly in words;  
and if the reader be a man, gives  
him a moment of great self-satisfac-  
tion and spiritual aggrandizement. In

many different authors you find passages more remarkable for grammar, but few of a more ingenious turn, & none that could be more to the point in our connection. The tenacity of many ordinary people in ordinary pursuits is a sort of standing challenge to everybody else. If one man can grow absorbed in delving his garden, others may grow absorbed and happy over something else. Not to be upsides in this with any groom or gardner, is to be very meanly organized. A man should be ashamed to take his food if he has not alchemy enough in his stomach to turn some of it into intense and enjoyable occupation. WALT WHITMAN

Whitman tries to reinforce this cheerfulness by keeping up a sort of outdoor atmosphere of sentiment. His book, he tells us, should be read "among the cooling influences of

WALT external nature;" and this recom-  
WHITMAN mendation, like that other famous  
one which Hawthorne prefixed to his  
collected tales, is in itself a character  
of the work. Every one who has been  
upon a walking or a boating tour,  
living in the open air, with the body  
in constant exercise and the mind in  
fallow, knows true ease and quiet.  
The irritating action of the brain is  
set at rest; we think in a plain, un-  
feverish temper; little things seem  
big enough, & great things no longer  
portentious; and the world is smil-  
ingly accepted as it is. This is the  
spirit that Whitman inculcates and  
parades. He thinks very ill of the  
atmosphere of parlors or libraries.  
Wisdom keeps school outdoors. And  
he has the art to recommend this at-  
titude of mind by simply pluming  
himself upon it as a virtue; so that  
the reader, to keep the advantage



over his author which most readers WALT  
enjoy, is tricked into professing the WHITMAN  
same view. And this spirit, as it is his  
chief lesson, is the greatest charm of  
his work. Thence, in spite of an un-  
even and emphatic key of expression,  
something trenchant and straightfor-  
ward, something simple and surpris-  
ing, distinguishes his poems. He has  
sayings that come home to one like  
the Bible. We fall upon Whitman,  
after the works of so many men who  
write better, with a sense of relief  
from strain, with a sense of touching  
nature, as when one passes out of the  
flaring, noisy thoroughfares of a great  
city into what he himself has called,  
with unexcelled imaginative justice of  
language, "the huge and thoughtful  
night." And his book in consequence,  
whatever may be the final judgment  
of its merit, whatever may be its  
influence on the future, should be in

WALT the hands of all parents & guard-  
WHITMAN ians as a specific for the distressing  
malady of being seventeen years old.  
Green-sickness yields to his treat-  
ment as to a charm of magic; and  
the youth, after a short course of  
reading, ceases to carry the universe  
upon his shoulders.

**F**AMILIARITY could not WALT deceive Whitman. He considers it just as wonderful WHITMAN that there are myriads of stars, as that one man should rise from the dead. He declares "a hair on the back of his hand just as curious as any special revelation." His whole life is to him what it was to Sir Thomas Browne, one perpetual miracle. Everything is strange, everything unaccountable, everything beautiful; from a bug to the moon, from the sight of the eyes to the appetite for food. He makes it his business to see things as if he saw them for the first time, and professes astonishment on principle. But he has no leaning toward mythology; avows his contempt for what he calls "unregenerate poetry"; and does not mean by nature:

"The smooth walks, trimmed hedges,

WALT butterflies, posies, and nightingales of  
WHITMAN the English poets, but the whole orb,  
with its geologic history, the Kosmos,  
carrying fire and snow, that rolls  
through the illimitable areas, light as  
a feather though weighing billions of  
tons."

Nor is this exhaustive; for in his character of idealist all impressions, all thoughts, trees and people, love and faith, astronomy, history, and religion, enter upon equal terms into his notion of the universe. He is not against religion; not, indeed, against any religion. He wishes to drag with a larger net, not to make more comprehensive synthesis, than any or than all of them put together. In feeling after the central type of man, he must embrace all eccentricities; his cosmology must subsume all cosmologies, and the feelings that gave birth to them; his statement of facts must

include all religion and all irreligion, WALT  
Christ and Boodha, God and the WHITMAN  
devil. The world as it is, & the whole  
world as it is, physical, and spiritual,  
and historical, with its good and bad,  
with its manifold inconsistencies, is  
what he wishes to set forth, in strong,  
picturesque, and popular lineaments,  
for the understanding of the average  
man. One of his favorite endeavors  
is to get the whole matter into a nut-  
shell; to knock the four corners of  
the universe, one after another, about  
his readers' ears; to hurry him, in  
breathless phrases, hither and thither,  
back and forward, in time and space;  
to focus all this about his own mo-  
mentary personality; and then, draw-  
ing the ground from under his feet,  
as if by some cataclysm of nature, to  
plunge him into the unfathomable  
abyss sown with enormous suns and  
systems, and among the inconceivable

WALT numbers and magnitudes and veloci-  
WHITMAN ties of the heavenly bodies. So that  
he concludes by striking into us some  
sense of that disproportion of things  
which Shelley had illuminated by  
the ironical flash of these eight  
words: The desire of the moth for  
the star.

The same truth, but to what a differ-  
ent purpose! Whitman's moth is  
mightily at his ease about all the  
planets in heaven, and cannot think  
too highly of our sublunary tapers.  
The universe is so large that imagi-  
nation flags in the effort to conceive  
it; but here, in the meantime, is the  
world under our feet, a very warm  
and habitable corner. "The earth,  
that is sufficient; I do not want the  
constellations any nearer," he re-  
marks. And again: "Let your soul  
stand cool and composed," says he,  
"before a million universes." It is

the language of a transcendental WALT common sense, such as Thoreau held WHITMAN and sometimes uttered. But Whitman, who has a somewhat vulgar inclination for technical talk and the jargon of philosophy, is not content with a few pregnant hints; he must put the dots upon his i's; he must corroborate the songs of Apollo by some of the darkest talk of human metaphysic. He tells his disciples that they must be ready "to confront the growing arrogance of Realism." Each person is, for himself, the keystone and the occasion of this universal edifice. "Nothing, not God," he says, "is greater to one than oneself is;" x a statement with an irreligious smack at the first sight; but like most startling sayings, a manifest truism on a second. He will give effect to his own character without apology; he sees "that the elementary laws never

WALT apologize." "I reckon," he adds, WHITMAN with quaint colloquial arrogance, "I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant my house by, after all." The level follows the law of its being; so, unrelentingly, will he; everything, every person, is good in his own place and way; God is the maker of all, and all are in one design. For he believes in God, & that with a sort of blasphemous security. "No array of terms," quoth he, "no array of terms can say how much at peace I am about God and about death." There certainly never was a prophet who carried things with a higher hand; he gives us less a body of dogmas than a series of proclamations by the grace of God; and language, you will observe, positively fails him to express how far he stands above the highest human doubts and trepidations.



But next in order of truths to a per- WALT  
son's sublime conviction of himself, WHITMAN  
comes the attraction of one person  
for another, and all that we mean by  
the word love:—

“The dear love of man for his com-  
rade—the attraction of friend  
for friend,  
Of the well-married husband & wife,  
of children and parents,  
Of city for city and land for land.”

The solitude of the most sublime  
idealist is broken in upon by other  
people's faces; he sees a look in their  
eyes that corresponds to something in  
his own heart; there comes a tone in  
their voices which convicts him of a  
startling weakness for his fellow-  
creatures. While he is hymning the  
*ego* and commercing with God and  
the universe, a woman goes below his  
window; and at the turn of her skirt

WALT or the color of her eyes, Icarus is recalled from heaven by the run. Love is so startlingly real that it takes rank upon an equal footing of reality with the consciousness of personal existence. We are as heartily persuaded of the identity of those we love as of our own identity. And so sympathy pairs with self-assertion, the two gerents of human life on earth; and Whitman's ideal man must not only be strong, free, and self-reliant in himself, but his freedom must be bounded and his strength perfected by the most intimate, eager, & long-suffering love for others. To some extent this is taking away with the left hand what has been so generously given with the right. Morality has been ceremoniously extruded from the door only to be brought in again by the window. We are told, on one page, to do as we please; and on the

next we are sharply upbraided for not **WALT**  
having done as the author pleases. We **WHITMAN**  
are first assured that we are the finest  
fellows in the world in our own right;  
and then it appears that we are only  
fine fellows in so far as we practise a  
most quixotic code of morals. The  
disciple who saw himself in clear ether  
a moment before is plunged down  
again among the fogs and complica-  
tions of duty. And this is all the more  
overwhelming because Whitman in-  
sists not only on love between sex and  
sex, and between friends of the same  
sex, but in the field of the less intense  
political sympathies; and his ideal man  
must not only be a generous friend  
but a conscientious voter into the  
bargain.

His method somewhat lessens the dif-  
ficulty. He is not, the reader will re-  
member, to tell us how good we ought  
to be, but to remind us how good we

WALT are. He is to encourage us to be free &  
WHITMAN kind, by proving that we are free and  
kind already. He passes our corporate  
life under review, to show that it is  
upheld by the very virtues of which  
he makes himself the advocate. "There  
is no object so soft," he says some-  
where in his big, plain way, "there  
is no object so soft but it makes a hub  
for the wheel'd universe." Rightly un-  
derstood, it is on the softest of all ob-  
jects, the sympathetic heart, that the  
wheel of society turns easily and se-  
curely as on a perfect axle. There is  
no room, of course, for doubt or dis-  
cussion about conduct, where every  
one is to follow the law of his being  
with exact compliance. Whitman hates  
doubt, deprecates discussion, and dis-  
courages to his utmost the craving,  
carping sensibilities of the conscience.  
We are to imitate, to use one of his  
absurd and happy phrases, "the sat-

isfaction and aplomb of animals." If WALT  
he preaches a sort of ranting Chris- WHITMAN  
tianity in morals, a fit consequent to  
the ranting optimism of his cosmology,  
it is because he declares it to be the  
original deliverance of the human  
heart; or at least, for he would be  
honestly historical in method, of the  
human heart as at present Christianized.  
His is a morality without a prohibition;  
his policy is one of encouragement  
all around. A man must be a born  
hero to come up to Whitman's standard  
in the practice of any of the positive  
virtues; but of a negative virtue,  
such as temperance or chastity, he has  
so little to say, that the reader need  
not be surprised if he drops a word or  
two upon the other side. He would  
lay down nothing that would be a clog;  
he would prescribe nothing that cannot  
be done ruddily, in a heat. The  
great point is to get people under way.

**WALT** To the faithful Whitmanite this would  
**WHITMAN** be justified by the belief that God made all, and that all was good; the prophet in his doctrine, has only to cry "Tally-ho," and mankind will break into a gallop on the road to El Dorado. Perhaps, to another class of minds, it may look like the result of the somewhat cynical reflection that you will not make a kind man out of one who is unkind by any precepts under heaven; tempered by the belief that, in natural circumstances, the large majority is well disposed. Thence it would follow, that if you can only get every one to feel more warmly and act more courageously, the balance of results will be for good.

So far, you see, the doctrine is pretty coherent as a doctrine; as a picture of man's life it is incomplete & misleading, although eminently cheerful.

This he is himself the first to ac- WALT  
knowledge; for if he is prophetic in WHITMAN  
anything, it is in his noble disregard  
of consistency. "Do I contradict my-  
self?" he asks somewhere; and then  
pat comes the answer, the best an-  
swer ever given in print, worthy of a  
sage, or rather of a woman: "Very  
well, then, I contradict myself!"  
with this addition, not so feminine &  
perhaps not altogether so satisfactory:  
"I am large—I contain multitudes."  
Life, as a matter of fact, partakes  
largely of the nature of tragedy. The  
gospel according to Whitman, even  
if it be not so logical, has this ad-  
vantage over the gospel according to  
Pangloss, that it does not utterly dis-  
regard the existence of temporal evil.  
Whitman accepts the fact of disease  
and wretchedness like an honest man;  
and instead of trying to qualify it in  
the interest of his optimism, sets him-

WALT self to spur people up to be helpful.

WHITMAN He expresses a conviction, indeed, that all will be made up to the victims in the end; that "what is untried and afterward" will fail no one, not even "the old man who has lived without purpose and feels it with bitterness worse than gall." But this is not to palliate our sense of what is hard or melancholy in the present. Pangloss, smarting under one of the worst things that ever was supposed to come from America, consoled himself with the reflection that it was the price we have to pay for cochineal. And with that murderous parody, logical optimism and the praises of the best of possible words went irrevocably out of season, and have been no more heard of in the mouths of reasonable men. Whitman spares us all allusions to the cochineal; he treats evil and sorrow in a spirit



almost as of welcome; as an old sea- WALT  
dog might have welcomed the sight WHITMAN  
of the enemy's topsails off the Span-  
ish Main. There, at least, he seems  
to say, is something obvious to be  
done. I do not know many better  
things in literature than the brief  
pictures,—brief and vivid like things  
seen by lightning,—with which he  
tries to stir up the world's heart upon  
the side of mercy. He braces us, on  
the one hand, with examples of he-  
roic duty and helpfulness; on the  
other, he touches us with pitiful in-  
stances of people needing help. He  
knows how to make the heart beat  
at a brave story; to inflame us with  
just resentment over the hunted slave;  
to stop our mouths for shame when  
he tells of the drunken prostitute.  
For all the afflicted, all the weak, all  
the wicked, a good word is said in a  
spirit which I can only call one of

WALT ultra-Christianity; and however wild,  
WHITMAN however contradictory, it may be in  
parts, this at least may be said for  
his book, as it may be said of the  
Christian Gospels, that no one will  
read it, however respectable, but he  
gets a knock upon his conscience;  
no one, however fallen, but he finds  
a kindly and supporting welcome.

**H**E has not been content **WALT**  
with merely blowing the **WHITMAN**  
trumpet for the battle of  
well-doing; he has given  
to his precepts the authority of his  
own brave example. Naturally a grave,  
believing man, with little or no sense  
of humor, he has succeeded as well  
in life as in his printed performances.  
The spirit that was in him has come  
forth most eloquently in his actions.  
Many who have only read his poetry  
have been tempted to set him down  
as an ass, or even as a charlatan; but  
I never met any one who had known  
him personally who did not profess a  
solid affection and respect for the  
man's character. He practises as he  
professes; he feels deeply that Chris-  
tian love for all men, that toleration,  
that cheerful delight in serving oth-  
ers, which he often celebrates in lit-  
erature with a doubtful measure of

WALT success. And perhaps, out of all his WHITMAN writings, the best and the most human and convincing passages are to be found in "these soil'd and creas'd little livraisons, each composed of a sheet or two of paper, folded small to carry in the pocket, and fastened with a pin," which he scribbled during the war by the bedsides of the wounded or in the excitement of great events. They are hardly literature in the formal meaning of the word; he has left his jottings for the most part as he made them; a homely detail, a word from the lips of a dying soldier, a business memorandum, the copy of a letter—short, straightforward to the point, with none of the trappings of composition; but they breathe a profound sentiment, they give us a vivid look at one of the sides of life, and they make us acquainted with a man

whom it is an honor to love. ¶ Whit- WALT  
man's intense Americanism, his un- WHITMAN  
limited belief in the future of These  
States (as, with reverential capitals,  
he loves to call them), made the war  
a period of great trial to his soul.  
The new virtue, Unionism, of which  
he is the sole inventor, seemed to  
have fallen into premature unpopu-  
larity. All that he loved, hoped, or  
hated, hung in the balance. And the  
game of war was not only momen-  
tous to him in its issues; it subli-  
mated his spirit by its heroic displays,  
and tortured him intimately by the  
spectacle of its horrors. It was a the-  
atre, it was a place of education, it  
was like a season of religious revival.  
He watched Lincoln going daily to  
his work; he studied and fraternized  
with young soldiery passing to the  
front; above all, he walked the hos-  
pitals, reading the Bible, distributing

WALT clean clothes, or apples, or tobacco;  
WHITMAN a patient, helpful, reverend man, full  
of kind speeches.

His memoranda of this period are almost bewildering to read. From one point of view they seem those of a district visitor; from another, they look like the formless jottings of an artist in the picturesque. More than one woman, on whom I tried the experiment, immediately claimed the writer for a fellow-woman. More than one literary purist might identify him as a shoddy newspaper correspondent without the necessary faculty of style. And yet the story touches home; and if you are of the weeping order of mankind, you will certainly find your eyes fill with tears, of which you have no reason to be ashamed. There is only one way to characterize a work of this order, and that is to quote. Here is a passage from a letter to a

mother, unknown to Whitman, whose son died in hospital:—

WALT  
WHITMAN

“Frank, as far as I saw, had everything requisite in surgical treatment, nursing, etc. He had watches much of the time. He was so good and well-behaved, and affectionate, I myself liked him very much. I was in the habit of coming in afternoons and sitting by him, and he liked to have me—liked to put out his arm and lay his hand on my knee—would keep it so a long while. Toward the last he was more restless and flighty at night—often fancied himself with his regiment—by his talk sometimes seem’d as if his feelings were hurt by being blamed by his officers for something he was entirely innocent of—said ‘I never in my life was thought capable of such a thing, and never was.’ At other times he would fancy himself talking as it seem’d to children or

WALT such like, his relatives, I suppose, and WHITMAN giving them good advice; would talk to them a long while. All the time he was out of his head not one single bad word, or thought, or idea escaped him. It was remark'd that many a man's conversation in his senses was not half so good as Frank's delirium.

“He was perfectly willing to die—he had become very weak, and had suffer'd a good deal, and was perfectly resign'd, poor boy. I do not know his past life, but I feel as if it must have been good. At any rate what I saw of him here, under the most trying circumstances, with a painful wound, and among strangers, I can say that he behaved so brave, so composed, and so sweet and affectionate, it could not be surpassed. And now, like many other noble and good men, after serving his country



as a soldier, he has yielded up his WALT  
young life at the very outset in her WHITMAN  
service. Such things are gloomy—yet  
there is a text, ‘God doeth all things  
well,’ the meaning of which, after  
due time, appears to the soul.

“I thought perhaps a few words,  
though from a stranger, about your  
son, from one who was with him at  
the last, might be worth while, for I  
loved the young man, though I but  
saw him immediately to lose him.”

It is easy enough to pick holes in the  
grammar of this letter, but what are  
we to say of its profound goodness  
and tenderness? It is written as  
though he had the mother’s face be-  
fore his eyes, and saw her wincing in  
the flesh at every word. And what,  
again, are we to say of its sober  
truthfulness, not exaggerating, not  
running to phrases, not seeking to  
make a hero out of what was only

WALT an ordinary but good & brave young  
WHITMAN man? Literary reticence is not Whit-  
man's stronghold; and this reticence  
is not literary, but humane; it is not  
that of a good artist but that of a  
good man. He knew that what the  
mother wished to hear about was  
Frank; and he told her about her  
Frank as he was.

**H**ERE something should be **WALT**  
said of Whitman's style, **WHITMAN**  
for style is of the essence  
of thinking. And where a  
man is so critically deliberate as our  
author, and goes solemnly about his  
poetry for an ulterior end, every in-  
dication is worth notice. He has  
chosen a rough, unrhymed, lyrical  
verse; sometimes instinct with a fine  
processional movement; often so rug-  
ged and careless that it can only be  
described by saying that he has not  
taken the trouble to write prose. I  
believe myself that it was selected  
principally because it was easy to  
write, although not without recollec-  
tions of the marching measures of  
some of the prose in our English Old  
Testament. According to Whitman,  
on the other hand, "the time has ar-  
rived to essentially break down the  
barriers of form between Prose and

WALT Poetry . . . for the most cogent pur-  
WHITMAN poses of those great inland states, &  
for Texas, and California, and Ore-  
gon;"—a statement which is among  
the happiest achievements of Amer-  
ican humor. He calls his verses "rec-  
itatives," in easily followed allusion  
to a musical form. "Easily-written,  
loose-fingered chords," he cries, "I  
feel the thrum of your climax and  
close." Too often, I fear, he is the  
only one who can perceive the  
rhythm; and in spite of Mr. Swin-  
burne, a great part of his work con-  
sidered as verse is poor bald stuff.  
Considered, not as verse, but as  
speech, a great part of it is full of  
strange and admirable merits. The  
right detail is seized; the right word,  
bold and trenchant, is thrust into its  
place. Whitman has small regard to  
literary decencies, and is totally free  
from literary timidities. He is neither

afraid of being slangy nor of being dull; nor, let me add, of being ridiculous. The result is a most surprising compound of plain grandeur, sentimental affectation, and downright nonsense. It would be useless to follow his detractors and give instances of how bad he can be at his worst; and perhaps it would be not much wiser to give extracted specimens of how happily he can write when he is at his best. These come in to most advantage in their own place; owing something, it may be, to the offset of their curious surroundings. And one thing is certain, that no one can appreciate Whitman's excellences until he has grown accustomed to his faults. Until you are content to pick poetry out of his pages almost as you must pick it out of a Greek play in Bohn's translation, your gravity will be continually up-

WALT  
WHITMAN

WALT set, your ears perpetually disappoint-  
WHITMAN ed, and the whole book will be no  
more to you than a particularly fla-  
grant production by the Poet Close.

¶ A writer of this uncertain quality  
was, perhaps, unfortunate in taking  
for thesis the beauty of the world as  
it now is, not only on the hill-tops,  
but in the factory; not only by the  
harbor full of stately ships, but in  
the magazine of the hopelessly pro-  
saic hatter. To show beauty in com-  
mon things is the work of the rarest  
tact. It is not to be done by the  
wishing. It is easy to posit as a the-  
ory, but to bring it home to men's  
minds is the problem of literature,  
and is only accomplished by rare  
talent, and in comparatively rare in-  
stances. To bid the whole world  
stand and deliver, with a dogma in  
one's right hand by way of pistol; to  
cover reams of paper in a galloping,

headstrong vein; to cry louder and WALT  
louder over everything as it comes WHITMAN  
up, and make no distinction in one's  
enthusiasm over the most incompar-  
able matters; to prove one's entire  
want of sympathy for the jaded, lit-  
erary palate, by calling, not a spade  
a spade, but a hatter a hatter, in a  
lyrical apostrophe;—this, in spite of  
all the airs of inspiration, is not the  
way to do it. It may be very wrong,  
and very wounding to a respectable  
branch of industry, but the word  
“hatter” cannot be used seriously in  
emotional verse; not to understand  
this, is to have no literary tact; and  
I would, for his own sake, that this  
were the only inadmissible expres-  
sion with which Whitman had be-  
decked his pages. The book teems  
with similar comicalities; and to a  
reader who is determined to take it  
from that side only, presents a per-

WALT fection carnival of fun. A good deal of  
WHITMAN this is the result of theory playing  
its usual vile trick upon the artist. It  
is because he is a Democrat that  
Whitman must have in the hatter. If  
you may say Admiral, he reasons,  
why may you not say Hatter? One  
man is as good as another, and it is  
the business of the "great poet" to  
show poetry in the life of the one as  
well as the other. A most incontro-  
vertible sentiment surely, and one  
which nobody would think of con-  
troverting, where—and here is the  
point—where any beauty has been  
shown. But how, where that is not  
the case? where the hatter is simply  
introduced, as God made him and as  
his fellow-men have miscalled him,  
at the crisis of a high-flown rhap-  
sody? And what are we to say, where  
a man of Whitman's notable capac-  
ity for putting things in a bright, pic-



turesque, and novel way, simply gives WALT up the attempt, and indulges, with WHITMAN apparent exultation, in an inventory of trades or implements, with no more color or coherence than in so many index-words out of a dictionary? I do not know that we can say anything, but that it is a prodigiously amusing exhibition for a line or so. The worst of it is, that Whitman must have known better. The man is a great critic, & so far as I can make out, a good one; and how much criticism does it require to know that capitulation is not description, or that fingering on a dumb keyboard, with whatsoever show of sentiment and execution, is not at all the same thing as discoursing music? I wish I could believe he was quite honest with us; but, indeed, who was ever quite honest who wrote a book for a purpose? It is a flight beyond the

WALT reach of human magnanimity. One  
WHITMAN other point, where his means failed  
him, must be touched upon, how-  
ever shortly. In his desire to accept  
all facts loyally and simply, it fell  
within his programme to speak at  
some length and with some plainness  
on what is, for I really do not know  
what reason, the most delicate of  
subjects. Seeing in that one of the  
most serious and interesting parts of  
life, he was aggrieved that it should  
be looked upon as ridiculous or  
shameful. No one speaks of maternity  
with his tongue in his cheek; and  
Whitman made a bold push to set the  
sanctity of fatherhood beside the  
sanctity of motherhood, & introduce  
this also among the things that can  
be spoken of without either a blush  
or a wink. But the Philistines have  
been too strong; and to say truth,  
Whitman has rather played the fool.

We may be thoroughly conscious that WALT  
his end is improving; that it would WHITMAN  
be a good thing if a window were  
opened on these close privacies of life;  
that on this subject, as on all others,  
he now and then lets fall a pregnant  
saying. But we are not satisfied. We  
feel that he was not the man for so  
difficult an enterprise. He loses our  
sympathy in the character of a poet  
by attracting too much of our atten-  
tion in that of a Bull in a China Shop.  
And where, by a little more art, we  
might have been solemnized ourselves,  
it is too often Whitman alone who is  
solemn in the face of an audience  
somewhat indecorously amused.

WALT  
WHITMAN



FINALLY, as most important, after all, to human beings in our disputable state, what is that higher prudence which was to be the aim and issue of these deliberate productions?

¶ Whitman is too clever to slip into a succinct formula. If he could have adequately said his say in a single proverb, it is to be presumed he would not have put himself to the trouble of writing several volumes. It was his programme to state as much as he could of the world with all its contradictions, and leave the upshot with God who planned it. What he has made of the world and the world's meanings is to be found at large in his poems. These altogether give his answers to the problems of belief and conduct; in many ways righteous and high-spirited, in some ways loose and contradictory. And yet there are two

passages from the preface to the WALT  
"Leaves of Grass" which do pretty WHITMAN  
well condense his teaching on all essential points, & yet preserve a measure of his spirit.

"This is what you shall do," he says in the one, "love the earth, and sun, and animals, despise riches, give alms to every one that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown, or to any man or number of men; go freely with powerful uneducated persons, and with the young, and mothers of families, read these leaves (his own works) in the open air every season of every year of your life; re-examine all you have been told at school or church, or in any book, and dismiss whatever

WALT insults your own soul." ¶ "The prudence of the greatest poet," he adds in the other—and the greatest poet is, of course, himself—"knows that the young man who composedly perilled his life and lost it, has done exceeding well for himself; while the man who has not perilled his life, and retains it to old age in riches and ease, has perhaps achieved nothing for himself worth mentioning; and that only that person has no great prudence to learn, who has learnt to prefer real long-lived things, and favors body and soul the same, and perceives the indirect surely following the direct, and what evil or good he does leaping onward and waiting to meet him again, and who in his spirit, in any emergency whatever, neither hurries nor avoids death."

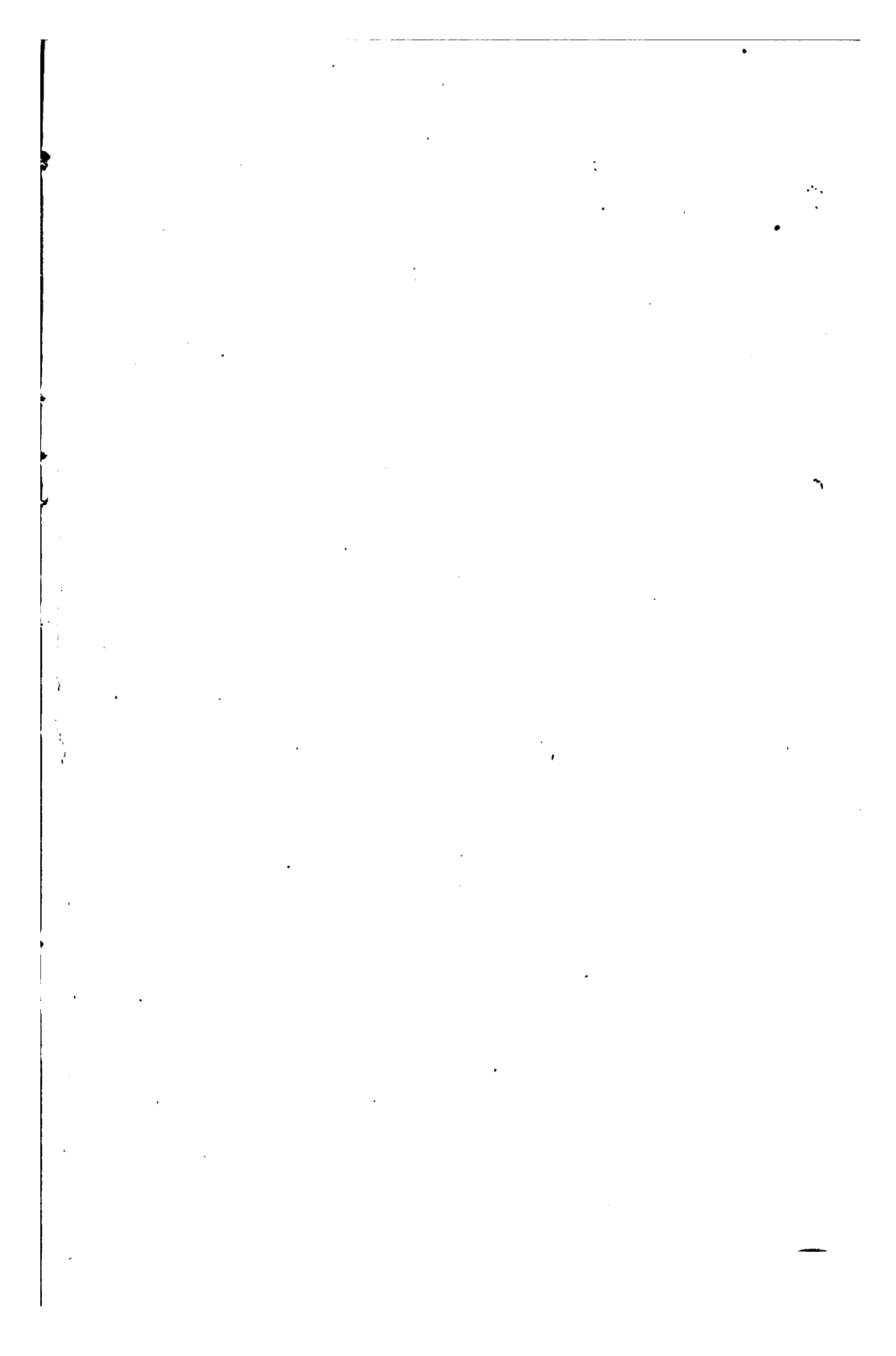
There is much that is Christian in these extracts, startlingly Christian.

Any reader who bears in mind Whit- WALT  
man's own advice and "dismisses WHITMAN  
whatever insults his own soul" will  
find plenty that is bracing, brighten-  
ing, and chastening to reward him for  
a little patience at first. It seems hard-  
ly possible that any being should get  
evil from so healthy a book as the  
"Leaves of Grass," which is simply  
comical wherever it falls short of no-  
bility; but if there be any such, who  
cannot both take and leave, who  
cannot let a single opportunity pass  
by without some unworthy and un-  
manly thought, I should have as great  
difficulty, and neither more nor less,  
in recommending the works of Whit-  
man as in lending them Shakespeare,  
or letting them go abroad outside of  
the grounds of a private asylum.

SO HERE ENDETH "THE ESSAY ON WALT WHITMAN," BY  
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON: THE FRONTISPIECE BEING A  
PHOTOGRAVURE OF THE BAS RELIEF BY ST. GEROME-ROY-  
CROFT, THE TITLE PAGE DESIGNED BY LOUIS RHEAD, AND  
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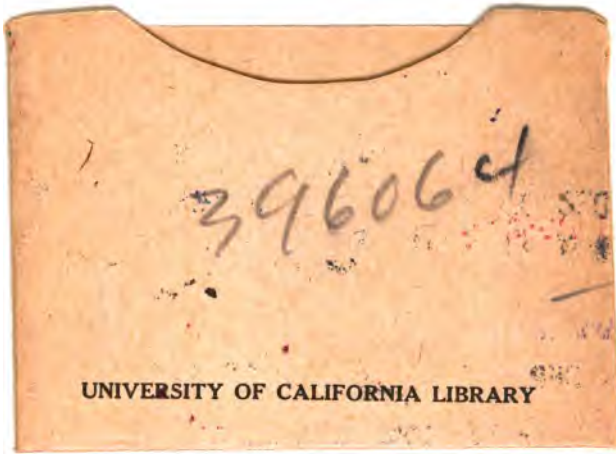
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